

School District of Rhinelander
Board of Education

Regular Monthly Meeting
Monday, March 23, 2026

MINUTES

The regular meeting of the Board of Education was called to order on Monday, March 23, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. in the Superior Diesel Advanced Learning Center at Rhinelander High School, 665 Coolidge Avenue, Rhinelander, WI.

Ronald Counter, Board President, led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call

Board Members Present: Judy Conlin, Mary Peterson, Mike Roberts, Duane Frey, Merlin Van Buren, Ronald Lueneburg, Kurt Helke, and Ronald Counter

Board Members Absent: Patricia Townsend

Others present at this meeting were: Superintendent, Eric Burke; Director of Business Services, Bob Thom; Director of Instruction, Ryan Ourada; Principal of James Williams Middle School, Kyle Raleigh; Associate Principal of James Williams Middle School, Ingrid Bodensteiner; Counselor at James Williams Middle School, Melissa Hasselberger; Counselor at James Williams Middle School, Ryan Tienhaara; School Psychologist, Britney Bolkema; DNR Forester, John Gillen; Community Education and School Forest Manager, Mike Cheslock; High School College & Career Counselor, Lexi Allen; Secretary/Deputy Clerk, Shelley Anderson, Heather Schaefer of the Northwoods Star Journal, and Ardith Carlton of the Northwoods River News. Six other people were also present.

Declaration of Public Notice

President Counter indicated that the 'Declaration of Public Notice' was printed with the meeting agenda. This notice identifies the public places where the meeting agenda was posted and/or shared.

Citizens/Delegations

- No citizens/delegations wished to address the Board.

Report Topics/Updates

President's Report – Ron Counter – President Counter reported on administrative actions taken in response to his observations of spectator behavior at a basketball game. He noted that spectator conduct during playoff games was positive.

Vice-President's Report – Judy Conlin – No report/comments were given.

James Williams Middle School - Spotlighting the Positive Impact of Building-Wide Character Strong Implementation - Presenters: Kyle Raleigh, Principal; Ingrid Bodensteiner, Associate Principal; Melissa Hasselberger, Counselor; Ryan Tienhaara, Counselor; Britney Bolkema, School Psychologist.

Staff from JWMS presented an overview of the Character Strong initiative, highlighting efforts to promote student well-being, belonging, and engagement through monthly character traits, weekly lessons, and lunch-time challenges. The program includes student and staff recognition, visual displays, and prize incentives. Participation data outcomes indicate increased student engagement, improved peer interactions, stronger coping skills, and a decrease in behavior referrals.

John Gillen, DNR Forester – Information Regarding the Upcoming Timber Sale.

A draft timber sale map and contract summary was presented for the Crystal Lake Aspen sale in the Town of Pine Lake, totaling 39 acres. The sale includes estimated volumes of aspen, mixed hardwoods, white pine, and saw logs with specified minimum bids. Harvesting guidelines, seasonal restrictions, road use, environmental protections, and trail considerations were outlined, with a three-year contract term.

Lexi Allen, High School College & Career Counselor – Update on the Education Academy and Youth Apprenticeship for the 2026-2027 School Year.

Lexi Allen presented the Education Roadmap, outlining a structured pathway for students interested in careers in education. The program includes coursework, dual credit opportunities, mentoring, internships, and a Youth Apprenticeship designed to provide hands-on classroom experience. The pathway emphasizes academic readiness, leadership, and professionalism, with the goal of developing future educators and strengthening the district's teacher pipeline.

Rhineland High School Student Council – Dylan Shefveland – Update on Student Council State Conference and Prom.

- No update/report was given.

Referendum Construction Project Update on Budget Status and Funding – Bob Thom.

Director of Business Services Bob Thom provided an update on the referendum construction project. He reported that a ribbon-cutting and open house for the James Williams Middle School remodel is scheduled for April 20, 2026, at 4:30 p.m., with self-guided tours available following the ceremony. Construction activity has largely paused until the end of the school year, and the project is currently projected to be completed within budget.

Revenue:

- **Interest:** \$1,286,799.11
- **Bond Proceeds:** \$26,000,000.00
- **Donations:** \$414,157.68
- Total Revenue:** \$27,700,959.79

Expenses:

- **Construction Services:** \$20,928,127.39
- **Supplies:** \$280,607.28
- **Equipment:** \$665,689.17

- **Insurance:** \$34,899.00
- **Fees, Permits, etc.:** \$58,353.70
- **Total Expenses:** \$21,967,676.54

- The \$26M in bond proceeds is invested in CDs and Treasury Bills with Ehlers Investment Services. The return is currently 3.16%.

Committee Chair Reports

Instruction and Accountability Committee

- Judy Conlin – The Committee recommended agenda items d and e to the Full Board.

Operations and Strategic Planning Committee

- Mike Roberts – The Committee recommended agenda items g, h, i, j, and k to the Full Board.

Employee Relations Committee

- Duane Frey – The Committee meeting focused on health insurance; no recommendations were brought forward to the Board.

Capital Projects Ad Hoc Committee

- No report was given as the Committee did not meet.

CESA 9 Representative Report

- No report was provided, as Merlin Van Buren was unable to attend due to his participation in the School Board Candidate Forum hosted by the Rhinelander High School Student Council in partnership with the League of Women Voters of the Northwoods.

Discussion, Reports/Updates, and/or Action Topics

Consider Approval of the Minutes from the February 16, 2026, Regular Board Meeting.

MOTION: R. Lueneburg, seconded by J. Conlin.

Approve the minutes of the February 16, 2026, Regular Board Meeting as printed.

M. Peterson and M. Roberts abstained.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Consider the Approval of the February 2026 Payment of Claims in the Amount of \$1,145,373.91 and the February 2026 Payment of Contracted Services in the Amount of \$542,349.43.

MOTION: M. Roberts, seconded by M. Van Buren.

Approve the February 2026 Payment of Claims in the Amount of \$1,145,373.91 and the February 2026 Payment of Contracted Services in the Amount of \$542,349.43.

Aye: J. Conlin, M. Peterson, M. Roberts, D. Frey, M. Van Buren, R. Lueneburg, K. Helke, R. Counter

Nay: None

Motion passed 8/0

Consider Acceptance of Various Gifts/Donations Contributed to the District.

MOTION: M. Peterson, seconded by K. Helke.

Accept with sincere gratitude the following gifts/donations:

- Two Newbery Award Winning books valued at \$36 from Jillayne and Jeff Waite.
- \$83.36 from the Oneida County: Cope-Mental Health Coalition.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Discussion and/or Action on the 2026-2027 New Rhinelander High School Courses.

MOTION: J. Conlin, seconded by M. Peterson.

The Board of Education approve the new courses for the 2026-2027 school year at Rhinelander High School as submitted.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Discussion and/or Action on Rhinelander High School Start College Now Requests for the 2026 Fall Semester.

MOTION: J. Conlin, seconded by M. Peterson.

The Board of Education approve an expenditure of up to \$125,000 for dual credit coursework in the 2026 fall semester through the Start College Now program at a technical college level.

Aye: J. Conlin, M. Peterson, M. Roberts, D. Frey, M. Van Buren, R. Lueneburg, K.

Helke, R. Counter

Nay: None

Motion passed 8/0

Discussion and/or Action on Second Reading of Policies Relating to Students, Finances, and Relations.

MOTION: R. Lueneburg, seconded by M. Roberts.

Board approve the second reading of:

Policy 5515 - Student Use and Parking of Motor Vehicles

Policy 6152.01 - Waiver of School Fees or Fines

Policy 6608 - Accountability and Oversight of Fundraiser and Crowdfunding

Disbursements

Policy 7540.08 - Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Policy 9215 - School Support Organizations

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Discussion and/or Action on Revisions to Policies Relating to Administration, Students, and Property.

MOTION: M. Roberts, seconded by R. Lueneburg.

Board approve the revisions to the following policies:

Policy 1240 - Evaluation of the District Administrator

Policy 5111.01 - Homeless Students

Policy 5136 - Personal Communication Devices

Policy 5505 - Academic Honesty

Policy 7540.02 - Digital Content and Accessibility

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Discussion and/or Action on Rescinding Policy Relating to Relations.

Policy 9211 – District-Support Organizations

MOTION: R. Lueneburg, seconded by M. Roberts.

Board approve to rescind the following policy:
Policy 9211 – District-Support Organizations
The motion passed with a voice vote.

Discussion and/or Action 2026-2027 Chromebook Replacements.

MOTION: M. Roberts, seconded by R. Lueneburg.

Board approve the purchase of 560 Chromebooks with licenses from BDJ Tech at a cost of \$171,920.00.

Aye: J. Conlin, M. Peterson, M. Roberts, D. Frey, M. Van Buren, R. Lueneburg, K. Helke, R. Counter

Nay: None

Motion passed 8/0

Discussion and/or Action on Refinishing and Replacement Needs for Outdoor Track, Indoor Track, and Indoor Tennis Courts.

MOTION: M. Roberts, seconded by M. Van Buren.

Board approve the refinishing of the RHS outdoor track for \$118,162 to be done by Upper Midwest with funds coming from the interest earned in the referendum account.

Aye: J. Conlin, M. Peterson, M. Roberts, D. Frey, M. Van Buren, R. Lueneburg, K. Helke, R. Counter

Nay: None

Motion passed 8/0

MOTION: M. Roberts, seconded by R. Lueneburg.

Board approve to replace the Hodag Dome indoor track for a net cost after insurance of \$31,444 using Upper Midwest full pour polyurethane with the funds coming from the referendum interest earnings.

Aye: J. Conlin, M. Peterson, M. Roberts, D. Frey, M. Van Buren, R. Lueneburg, K. Helke, R. Counter

Nay: None

Motion passed 8/0

MOTION: M. Roberts, seconded by R. Lueneburg.

Board approve to have the Hodag Dome tennis courts patched and recoated by Upper Midwest for \$47,870 with the funding coming from insurance.

Aye: J. Conlin, M. Peterson, M. Roberts, D. Frey, M. Van Buren, R. Lueneburg, K. Helke, R. Counter

Nay: None

Motion passed 8/0

Discussion and/or Action on CESA 9 Contract for the 2026-2027 School Year.

MOTION: M. Roberts, seconded by M. Peterson.

Board approve 2026-2027 CESA 9 Shared Services Contract as proposed.

Aye: J. Conlin, M. Peterson, M. Roberts, D. Frey, M. Van Buren, R. Lueneburg, K. Helke, R. Counter

Nay: None

Motion passed 8/0

Discussion and/or Action on Tentative Offers for Employment.

MOTION: R. Lueneburg, seconded by J. Conlin.

Authorize the Superintendent and/or his designee to offer tentative employment to qualified applicants, with final employment upon approval of the School Board for the 2026-2027 school year

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Superintendent's Report – Eric Burke – School Year Updates and Celebrations

- Eric Burke stated the School District of Rhinelander and its community partners were featured in a profile by author Julie Anixter as part of her “Role Models for Life” research project, recognizing the community as a model for preparing students for post-secondary success. The profile highlights strong collaboration among the district, local businesses, and community leaders to support college and career readiness. The profile concludes that Rhinelander’s model demonstrates what can happen when a community takes shared responsibility for preparing the next generation and offers this promise: When a community invests in its students, its future becomes stronger for everyone.
- The Rhinelander Chamber of Commerce featured Superintendent Eric Burke in a podcast episode discussing district initiatives, including recent construction and facility improvements, current opportunities and challenges in education, and the district’s efforts to prepare students for post-graduation success. The conversation also emphasized the importance of strong schools in supporting a thriving community.
- The District will host the Northwoods Career & Collaborative Summit on April 15, 2026, at CAVOC (Cedric A. Vig Outdoor Classroom), with representatives from Nicolet College, CESA 9, and northern area schools expected to attend. Board members were encouraged to attend as well.

Adjournment

MOTION: R. Lueneburg, seconded by M. Roberts.

Move to adjourn.

The motion passed with a voice vote at 7:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Peterson, Board of Education Clerk